

MAINE RURAL AMERICORPS GRANT REVIEW (12/2018)

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Task Force Final Recommendation: | Fund with requirement corrections and clarifications be made. |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|

RFP Due Date: 11/30/2018

Application Number : 19AC209714

Legal Applicant: Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center

Grant Type: ☒ Cost reimbursement
☐ Fixed Amount
☐ Education Award Only

Project Name: Seeds of Hope - AmeriCorps Formula Community Outreach

Project Contact: Rev Shirley Bowen

MSYs and Slots requested: 2 MSY (2 slots)

Budget Proposed

CNCS funds 29,864.00

Local Match 20,624.00

Cost per Members \$14,932.00

Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.

Maine Spark, General Assistance Office, Banks, Career Resource Center, Alternative Pathways, Homeless Initiative Task Force

Applicant proposes to deliver services: (select what the applicant states in their application that their program will cover:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Within a single municipality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Within a single County but not covering the entire County |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County-wide in a single County | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Counties but not Statewide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statewide | |

Which CNCS focus area does this applicant identify as related to its proposal? Do the applicant's activities in each focus area fall under the type of activities CNCS says are acceptable (see RFP page 82-9)? Do the performance measures chosen match the focus area?

| Focus Area Identified | Activities are within list of acceptable for funding |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disaster Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Futures | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Economic Opportunity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Veterans and Military Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Capacity building | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

| Performance Measures | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Do the Service Activity performance measures chosen match the focus area? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do the Capacity Building performance measures match one of the sets listed in the RFP? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Do the Member Development performance measures exactly match the set provided in the RFP? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

Executive Summary

The Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center proposes to have two (2) AmeriCorps members who will recruit and train Center volunteers, staff our Career Resource Center, serve as front-line managers of the drop-in center, and work

actively with the Executive Director on addressing the needs of the homeless in Biddeford, Saco, Old Orchard Beach and the surrounding communities in southern Maine. At the end of the first year the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for expanding the services offered in our Career Resource Center and managing the day-to-day operations of our drop-in center. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional twenty (20) volunteers who will be engaged in preparing the breakfast and lunch dining options for our neighbors (those we serve), sorting donated clothing and other household items for distribution, responding to requests for referrals, and being supports to neighbors who access our services. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area of Economic Opportunity. The CNCS investment of \$29,864 will be matched with \$20,624 from Seeds of Hope.

Seeds of Hope serves 400+ meals/week to help supplement the scarce resources of our families. Serving this number of meals has significantly taxed our volunteer base. Efficient operation requires 4 volunteers/day, but frequently we are forced to function with just 2. And because many of our volunteers are retired, we lose approximately ¼ to southern climates in the first quarter of each calendar year, resulting in some volunteers working more than 1 day/week. This can lead to burnout and higher turnover.

As is the case across the country, quality affordable housing is scarce. The current waiting list for subsidized housing in Biddeford is 8-10 years. The numbers of homeless are increasing, including among children. Biddeford school system reports 50+ students are currently homeless. the national Point in Time Homeless Survey conducted annually, identified 40+ adults in Biddeford alone.

In addition to meeting basic needs and addressing unstable housing, Seeds of Hope provides one-on-one support for those who are seeking employment.

Performance measures (targets proposed for Year 1; targets for years 2 and 3 set in continuations):

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: OUTPT57444 Number of Volunteer mentors recruited for program delivery

Proposed target: 10

OUTCOME: OUTCM57445 Number of individuals completing the Work Readiness program and achieving employment

Proposed target: 10

OUTPUT: O1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 30

OUTCOME: O11: Number of individuals transitioned into safe, healthy, affordable housing

Proposed target: 10

OUTPUT: O1A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 20

OUTCOME: O9: Number of individuals with improved financial knowledge

Proposed target: 20

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Not entered

CAPACITY BUILDING

Not entered

Scoring Detail:

Peer Reviewer Consensus Score. *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring. The break downs within categories are from federal agency and change annually.*

| CATEGORY | Qualitative Rating | Points |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%) | | |
| Need (5) | Strong | 5 |
| Intervention (8) | Strong | 8 |
| Theory of Change, Evidence, and Logic Model (8) | Weak | 2.64 |
| Work Plan Year 1 (8) | Adequate | 5.36 |
| Notice Priority (1) | Strong | 1 |
| Member training (6) | Adequate | 4.02 |
| Member supervision (5) | Adequate | 3.35 |
| Member Experience (5) | Weak | 1.65 |
| Commitment to AmeriCorps Identity (3) | Adequate | 2.01 |
| Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25% | | |
| Organizational Background and Staffing (10) | Adequate | 6.7 |
| Compliance and Accountability (15) | Adequate | 10.05 |
| Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25% | | |
| Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25) | Strong | 25 |
| TOTAL | | 74.78 |
| 60-79, Recommend for Further Review with Hesitation | | |

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

| | Score |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Program Model | 10.05 |
| Past Performance | 4.95 |
| Financial Plan | 3.3 |
| Fiscal Systems | 6.7 |
| Total Task Force Score | 25 |
| Peer Review Score | 74.78 |
| Final Score for Applicant | 99.78 of 150 potential |

Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Fund with no corrections/modifications
☒ Fund with corrections/modifications
☐ Do Not Fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- Clarify tasks of AmeriCorps members to ensure there is sufficient direct service for full-time status.
- Budget narrative is incomplete (no response under Source of Funds for grantee share) and some formulas lack full information.
- Add required performance measures.
- Update financial management standards to meet federal requirements.
- Develop and add to proposal the program logic model. (Applicants were directed to not submit this and plan for working with MCCA staff to develop/enter it if selected for award.)

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Section: Program Design (50 %)

Note: CNCS has subdivided this part of the narrative into 5 parts. The comments indicate the part and follow the narrative outline in the RFP.

Need

- This ranking was between adequate and strong. Communities less than 50,000, area has 8.2-13.7% poverty = and provides 400+ meals a week, 50 plus are currently homeless. Not a focus county
- The proposal provided statistics from several sources. They have partnered with several community members to include businesses, the school system, and other agencies in order to identify the need for education, job training, and housing.
- Volunteer-based org, supported by older population of snowbirds leads to inconsistent staffing

Intervention

- Roles are well laid out and performance measured and defined. Community involvement well defined. Target is defined. aligns with the need of the community
- A more detailed description of the core activities of the intervention is needed. The narrative gives the overview, but not the detail.
- 2 members time is not adequately represented- especially as staffing a drop in center may be underutilized with larger project expectations if the center is underutilized

Theory of change (narrative text) and logic model

- Success will be in development of the sustainable model- who is on board in the community and how the member interact within the community
- Quantity of service units was minimally discussed, with no expectation of outcome stated.
- Engagement with existing organizations and initiatives is positive, but minimal hard data to back up organizational effectiveness

Evidence

- Many good partners - program based United Healthcare /VolunteerMatch do good live well study of 2010
- They will be using a proven model for one member, and cited a study on the effects of volunteerism on the volunteers.
- Weak, leading to the rating. United Healthcare/Volunteer Match

Work Plan for Year One

- Meetings with 20 businesses annually- training of members on how to be successful. collaborating with community. Concern with meeting 90 people a week. How do you know their story
- There are successive, definitive goals laid out for each member position.
- Ambitious goals, outlined over 3 years, but more meetings than deliverables

Notice Priority

- Strong economic opportunity and meets regulatory requirements. Address 3 areas - training and skill to get competitive wages, work provides transition out of homelessness and food security
- The funding priority is Economic Opportunity and the proposal falls within the regulatory guidelines.
- Explanation for the funding priorities of the organization, but not how the AmeriCorps member will support those.

Member Training

- Most of the training would come on the job and from the supervisor.
- There is a plan to provide initial training to the members to work with the target population, and members will be introduced to community stakeholders by the Executive Director. The plan states that the agency will provide other relevant training for the positions.
- Covers AmeriCorps guidelines and history of organization and rationale for staffing, as well as risk management and some position-specific training

Member Experience

- Great focus on experience in area of need, Members get exposure to non profits, presentation, training and how to motivate people, recruitment and people management
- Members will gain experience in volunteer recruitment and management, as well as in working directly with clients and community partners. These skills are transferable to other non-profit work. Reflection will be utilized during the weekly supervisory meetings. There was no mention of additional meaningful service opportunities or connection with the greater AmeriCorps network.
- How will members be supported in a small non-profit, working with vulnerable populations? Specifically, which skills will be developed beyond presentations? More specificity and depth is needed.

Member Supervision

- The ED would be the direct supervisor, ED's background speaks of training and prior supervision abilities. Not sure if ED had involvement in supervision of AmeriCorp members in the past.
- Supervision will be consistent and will occur regularly. The supervisor has many years of experience in this area.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- Badges will be provided to identify members. Will be introduced to organization as AmeriCorp Service Learning Members
- Name tags will indicate them as members, and introductions to area partners will as well. There was no mention of AmeriCorps gear.
- Roles titled AmeriCorps, minimal connections with larger AmeriCorps network

Section: Organizational Capability (25 %)

Organizational Background and Staffing

- The existing has one permanent employee and one part time employee.
- The organization has been in existence for ten years and has maintained an adequate number of volunteers to maintain operations at five days a week, up from two when they began. There is a very small staff, but the Executive Director has 32 years of experience and the support of a 14 member board.
- Strong ED, with volunteer support, but doesn't address the challenge of being the '2nd employee' and how the AmeriCorps member will be integrated properly

Compliance and Accountability

- Checks and Balance are in place but no third parts audit.
- Due to the minimal staffing of the organization, the board has taken on an active role in oversight. Funds are monitored by an experienced Treasurer and policies are in place for limits on, and board approval of, expenditures. This system provides additional oversight due to the lack of ability to have segregation of duties. This is a best practice.
- Volunteer Board members reviewing financial record keeping indicates a need for support, but also a risk for AmeriCorps

Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)

- Strong financials- small program operating with many volunteers
- The cost per MY is within the guidelines and the match level is met. I believe there is great potential for in-kind match to be collected from the various partners that the members will be working with.
- More funding for staff training than member training, also some expenses seem underreported- ie Conference costs may be more than mileage (registration, meals, hotel, etc.)

SUMMARY APPRAISAL 1. Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? Yes (3)

Comments:

- This program fit a need in this area
- The proposal is well thought out and the work plan is precise. The agency appears to have a strong partnership with several organizations, all who are working towards the success of this program.
- Proposal is lacking details on how the AmeriCorps member would be fully supported, utilized, and engaged with the community.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- how to get local areas involved and how to meet 90+ individuals weekly and get a feel of their story
- N/A
- What will AmeriCorps members due if the drop in hours are quiet? Or what avenues for professional development are available/connected to in the community that would be accessible to an AmeriCorps member outside of the ED?

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- It has a definite need that should be addressed.
- While the proposal itself is lacking in some measures, the plan laid out for measurement is a good one. I believe the measurements will only make future proposals stronger, and will lay out a more clear path for program goals.
- The organization appears deserving, however the proposal needs to include contingencies for alternative experiences, rainy days, or member placement or community engagement issues.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Model. This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and it's demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.

1. How closely is the community need targeted by the proposal aligned with the funding priorities stated in the Request for Proposals? As described, is the need clearly and strongly associated with one of the statewide needs (including rural programs) the Commission is trying to address? If the proposed program succeeds, will it contribute to significant change or improvement in a condition that is of high concern in a broader context (statewide, regional)?

The proposal addresses Economic Opportunity with a focus on addressing homelessness through job readiness training, assistance in finding affordable housing, and food security. The need is outlined through statistics on the poverty level of the communities to be served and the results of homeless surveys. No comparative data is presented to illustrate how the need in this service area compares with that of the state/other areas. While the area served may not strike those of us from Maine as rural, it does meet the definition. Poverty and homelessness is a significant problem in Maine, particularly in its service center communities that often offer the types of services most needed by this population. The drop in center model is potentially of the greatest use in developing a scalable approach to the problem that other communities might adopt. While I am aware of other such approaches for different target populations, I'm not aware of any in Maine aimed at homelessness/poverty.

2. As described, is the program model focused more strongly on external impact (outcomes in the community) or internal impact (outcomes in the organizations working in the community)? Is the focus appropriate for the ultimate goals of this funding and the need?

The program appears to be aimed at both external impact and internal; however, it appears that the organization's greatest need is to expand its volunteer base in order to continue to support its current programs while expanding its services aimed at assisting in job readiness and employment. With a small staff, it appears that the organization is looking to have the AC members provide staffing to two of its programs that may have very limited staffing now while also working to attract volunteers to maintain those operations longer-term. In the end, this appears to be more a capacity building effort.

3. Does the proposed scale or scope of the program meet the funding or resource allocation goals of the Commission (geographic, population sector, etc.) that were stated in the RFP?

Yes, although the work plan laid out appears to be ambitious with 50% of member time devoted to operating the resource center and drop in center. To some extent, it appears that the AC members will likely function as navigators, assisting clients to others for services, while providing some direct services as well.

4. Is the program model one that is permitted under AmeriCorps? (youth corps, team, dispersed site, etc.)
Yes.
5. Are there local circumstances that are shared by other communities or regions and, therefore, program development/success has broader implications or usefulness in Maine?
Yes/
6. Is there evidence the applicant understands volunteer management and has an organizational commitment to supporting service by volunteers? Does the readiness survey section on volunteer management indicate the organization is prepared to engage volunteers? If the organization is just starting to implement volunteer management, are there other indicators in the readiness assessment that point to likely support for volunteer engagement?

With only one full time and one part time staff member, the organization is currently largely dependent on volunteers to provide its services, so it is clear that it is committed to supporting services by volunteers and has been somewhat successful at it, although challenged to find adequate numbers.

Summary comment:

The program has high potential but needs tweaking to ensure that AmeriCorps Member time is used efficiently during down time at the drop-in center. This program would work to increase the capacity of Seeds of Hope which in turn would allow a successful 501c3 to further its mission of Mercy and Justice while addressing workforce and poverty issues in their region. Leveraging partner capacity with MaineSpark and their staff is another strength in supporting the success of the program.

Past Performance

- This was not required in this competition. Looking at other elements of the organization that might give an indication of its capabilities, I would probably move this rating up to week. It's a small agency that will largely be reliant on its executive director and volunteer treasurer to manage this grant. They do not appear to have experience, at least recently, with managing a federal grant with all of its requirements and complications. At the same time, the organization does seem to be financially stable and has received funding from the CDBG program.

- Though they have never received an AmeriCorp grant, they do have a history of acquiring past grant funding to successfully execute and deliver programming to meet their missions needs. Their biggest issue right now is building capacity as an organization.

Financial Plan

- Most of the usual budgetary errors including budgeting for FT members in first year, although perhaps a few more issues/errors than is normal. Match sources are not defined. Situation is correctable and I am ok with rating this area as adequate with a requirement that the budget issues be cleaned up.
- It appears that Seeds of Hope failed to enter required information into their financial plan, the match was not identified, and their indirect costs were not correctly calculated. Another worrisome piece is that background checks were not budgeted for. When MCCS received their State audit, background checks being done in one of our Americorp programs was an issue. This needs to be corrected. Another weak point is the marketing and branding of Americorp during the program. Finally, though the match was not identified, I am assuming it will come from their substantial financial margin from the previous fiscal year. The incompleteness of the plan is not terminal to their being awarded the grant, but these issues would have to be addressed.

Fiscal Systems

- Remarks to Support Rating: Here again, the rating is more likely on the border between weak and adequate given the lack of experience in handling a complex federal grant and what appear to be a rather simple accounting system that, while adequate for their current operation, will require some tweaking to handle this grant.
- This organization is in a strong fiscal position and has the capacity for success with the grant awarded. They will have to develop practices and policies that allow them to record grant funds separately and to meet the minimum standards for managing federal funds.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL

1. *Having reviewed all elements of the proposal provided to you, do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant?*

Yes (2)

- See the comments above, particularly on program model. In addition, the organization appears to be fairly stable with improving finances and a strong volunteer corps, although one that needs enhancement through additional outreach.
- The program is strong and, though the financial plan was not complete, I believe this organization can successfully adjust their financial plan and demonstrates good fiscal acumen, HR management skills, and the ability to successfully deliver this program.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- Some thought should be given to how to best use the AC member time when they are staffing the drop in center and job center, given that there may be down time involved when other tasks/responsibilities could be undertaken. The drop in center model could, if successful, serve as a model for other areas in the state. My thinking is that the AC members will actually be functioning as navigators who will be assisting clients in accessing the help and services that they need not just from Seeds of Hope but also from other agencies and organizations. One task that might be helpful is for them to compile full reference material on other sources of assistance to which clients could be referred and to help clients through those processes, which can be difficult and daunting. Cross training of the two members will be important and may not have been completely addressed in the application.
- Their financial plan needs to be adjusted, they were lacking many different aspects of their plan. Also, they could expand upon what the AmeriCorp members will do if the drop-in center is slow.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- Growing the volunteer base will be essential to maintaining this program in the future; in addition, the organization might consider working toward adding a new staff position to take over from the AC members at grants end. Addressing sustainability needs to be strengthened.
- Their connection to Leadership Maine and the MaineSpark initiative are two very strong points in which this organization can bring in extra support and could potentially help improve the impact of this program through awareness and advocacy.